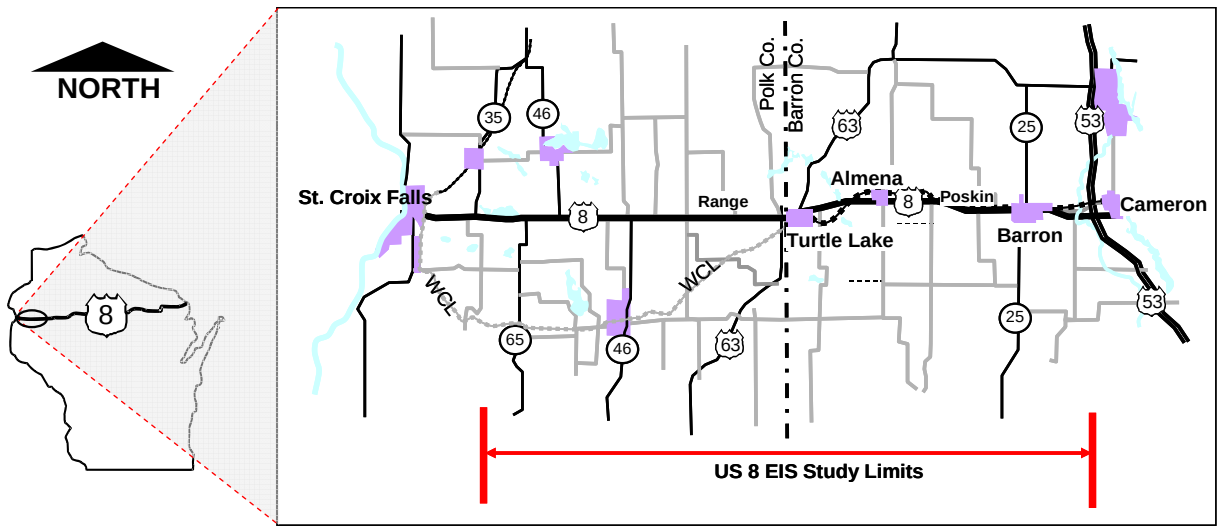
ES.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ES.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The US 8 corridor evaluated in this document begins at WIS 35 (N) in Polk County and extends approximately 40 miles (64 km) to US 53 in Barron County, Wisconsin. Within the project limits, the corridor passes through the communities of Range and Poskin (unincorporated), Villages of Turtle Lake and Almena, and City of Barron. The corridor passes through the Towns of St. Croix Falls, Balsam Lake, Apple River, Beaver, Almena, Clinton, Barron, and Stanley. Figure ES.1-1 shows the location of the project.



ES.1-1 US 8 Project Location Map

ES.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

US 8 is designated as a rural principal arterial highway, serving traffic movements that are interstate, statewide or interregional in nature. Primarily a two-lane highway, US 8 has a four-lane section within the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron. US 8 forms a distinct area for the corridor study as local and regional traffic patterns change beyond each of the project termini where US 8 connects to multilane highways. West of the WIS 35 (N) intersection and continuing for 4.5 miles to the St. Croix River, US 8 is a four-lane undivided, high-speed suburban roadway with a two-way left turn lane in some segments. Once US 8 crosses the St. Croix River, it becomes a two-lane urban facility in Taylors Falls, Minnesota. West of Taylors Falls, US 8 is a two-lane rural highway. On the east end of the project, US 8 intersects US 53, a rural, four-lane north-south freeway, before it continues easterly into the Village of Cameron. The US 8 corridor is of sufficient length to address environmental issues on a broad basis. The termini are logical since the segment has independent utility that does not require or preclude future options.

ES.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to identify the preferred corridor for eventual construction of a multilane facility meeting future transportation and safety needs for US 8. Because of the 40 mile (64 km) project length, it has been divided into individual segments for study. Each segment has one or more alternatives. The segments and alternatives are identified in Section 2 Alternatives. The overall “preferred alternative” corridor selected will be a combination of preferred segment alternatives. A preferred alternative that satisfies the project purpose and need will then be preserved until proposed long-range improvements are warranted. To satisfy the purpose of this project, the future US 8 improvement alternative should create a transportation system that complements and supports planned land uses and transportation systems and preserves highway mobility on the corridor. The transportation corridor must be consistent with the national, state, regional, and local importance of US 8 and avoid or minimize

adverse environmental impacts. A tiered approach is used to provide identification of a preferred corridor and the transportation solutions to address both immediate and long-term needs.

- Tier 1 is this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The document is used to gain consensus on the basic location and design vision for the overall corridor. Tier 1 is not intended to provide detailed engineering to a level that identifies the new corridor centerline, or right-of-way limits, or high-accuracy construction cost estimates.

- Tier 2 (future) would include formal corridor preservation efforts for portions on existing alignment and portions located on new alignment.

- Tier 3 (future) would include efforts to advance the proposed corridor design engineering to a level necessary for enumeration for construction as a Major highway project[1] or inclusion into another State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Tier 3 efforts could involve any one or a number of corridor segments depending on conditions and available funding.

- Tiers 2 or 3 would include additional environmental documentation in the form of second tier Environmental Impact Statements or Environmental Assessments, depending on the location and extent of the corridor segment improvement.

- The ultimate completion of 40 miles (64 km) of a multilane facility will require some Major highway project enumeration and will likely take decades to fund and complete.

The US 8 project is needed because:

- **US 8 is a route of national, state, regional, and local importance.** US 8 is included in the National Highway System (NHS) and is designated as a Connector Route in the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) Corridors 2020 plan. As a federal and state truck route, US 8 is used for the transport of goods and services and provides communities along the corridor with access to local and regional services. As a major east-west corridor in northwest Wisconsin, US 8 is also an important tourist and recreation route. US 8 passes through the central areas of Polk and Barron counties, connecting the metropolitan area of the Twin Cities with northern Wisconsin. US 8 provides a direct connection to US 53, US 63, Wisconsin State Trunk Highway (WIS) 35, WIS 25, WIS 65, and WIS 46.

- **Long-term planning and corridor preservation are needed.** The growth of adjacent communities has, and will continue to place both additional traffic and demand on the US 8 Corridor. It is essential that long-term planning and corridor preservation for the US 8 Corridor occur in advance of these demands.

- **Future traffic volumes indicate a need for additional capacity.** Current traffic volumes on US 8 in the rural areas range from 6,370 to 10,950 average daily traffic (ADT). Projected traffic volumes in the year 2030 are expected to range from 9,900 to 14,800 ADT for these same areas. As traffic volumes increase above the levels that define what is appropriate for a Corridors 2020 connector route, capacity expansion will be needed.

- **Improvements are needed to correct substandard roadway items.** Substandard roadway items along US 8 include inadequate stopping sight distance on vertical curves, horizontal curves with superelevation that exceed the maximum of six percent, and substandard shoulder width in one segment. Improvements are also desired where access points exceed WisDOT's Facilities Development Manual (FDM) guidelines, particularly in the City of Barron and Poskin, Range, and Deer Lake areas.

[1] By statute, a "Major highway project" denotes a project that has a total cost over $5 million and involves any of the following: constructing a new highway 2.5 miles (4 km) or more in length; reconstructing or reconditioning an existing highway by either relocating 2.5 miles (4 km) or more of the existing highway, adding one or more lanes five miles or more in length to the existing highway, or improving to freeway standards 10 miles or more of existing divided highway having two or more lanes in either direction.

- **Crash rates are high in urban areas.** From 1996-2000 crashes were above the statewide urban average in two of the five years in the Village of Turtle Lake. In the City of Barron, crashes were above the statewide urban average in four of the five years.

- **Legislative mandate and public input.** The State Legislature enumerated funds for a US 8 study in 2001. A corridor study of this scale requires an EIS. The mandate for the corridor study was a result of input by the US 8 Coalition, a group of county and local officials formed in the mid-1990s to communicate concerns about safety and congestion along the corridor. Public support has been high for improvements that address congestion, safe access to and from US 8, and mobility for both local and regional traffic.

ES.4 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternatives were developed for the US 8 corridor and subsequently evaluated for how well they address the project's purpose and need. Alternatives that meet the purpose and need criteria are studied in detail throughout the document. Alternatives that do not satisfy the criteria are dismissed. The criteria that the alternatives must address are:

- Addressing Corridors 2020 Plan (Route Importance) and Future LOS
- Addressing Long-term Planning and Corridor Preservation
- Reducing Crash Rates in Urban Areas
- Correcting Substandard Roadway Items
- Addressing Legislative Mandate and Public Response

ES.4.1 Alternative Descriptions

A. Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategies are developed to reduce traffic congestion and other environmental effects. The strategies are designed to reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) and emphasize non-motorized or higher occupancy travel modes. TDM comprises all transportation forms. Some TDM strategies include transit, ridesharing and ride matching, walking and bicycling, telecommuting, staggered work schedules, parking management, transportation allowances, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities/park and ride lots, no-drive days, trip reduction ordinances, and complementary incentives.

The TDM strategies would not meet the project purpose and need criteria and were not carried through for analysis. TDM strategies would not address the current transportation needs of US 8 and are therefore not considered a viable project alternative. The implementation of TDM strategies is not likely to have much effect on traffic along US 8 and may be difficult to initiate because of limited existing public transportation facilities.

B. No-build Alternative

Under the No-build Alternative, improvements to US 8 would consist primarily of maintenance activities and spot improvements. US 8 would remain a two-lane rural highway from WIS 35 (N) to US 53. Within the Village of Turtle Lake and City of Barron, US 8 would remain as a four-lane undivided roadway. Maintenance activities could include road resurfacing and/or signalization of intersections.

C. Passing Lane Alternative

The Passing Lane Alternative would add passing lanes along the existing US 8 corridor. The Passing Lane Alternative would not provide for future corridor preservation or any other improvements outside the locations identified for proposed passing lanes. The US 8 corridor has existing passing lanes in nine locations. Six of the nine passing lanes are located east of WIS 46 (S) and were constructed between 2001-2003. The existing passing lanes are at the following locations:

Existing Eastbound Passing Lane Locations

- Between WIS 35 (N) and WIS 65 (S) [starting 2.0 miles (3.2 km) east of WIS 35 (N)]
- Between Balsam Brook and WIS 46 (N) [about 0.8 miles (1.3 km)]
- Between WIS 46 (S) and County E [1.5 miles (2.4 km)]
- Between 50th Street and County V [1.25 miles (2.0 km)]
- Between Poplar Street and Almena [1.3 miles (2.1 km)]

Existing Westbound Passing Lanes

- Between 120th Street and WIS 46 (N) (starting about 1.1 miles (1.8 km) east of WIS 46 (N)
- Between County D and County E [1.5 miles (2.4 km)]
- Between 10th Street and 125th Avenue [1.5 miles (2.4 km)]
- Between 2 ½ Street and 3rd Street [0.5 miles (0.8 km)] (east of Turtle Lake)

The Passing Lane Alternative proposes six additional passing lane locations be constructed. These improvements would be at the following locations:

Proposed Eastbound Passing Lanes

- Between WIS 35 (N) to about 0.5 miles (0.8 km) west of 170th Street [1.5 miles (2.4 km)]
- Between WIS 46 (N) to about 0.5 miles (0.8 km) west of 120th Street [1.5 miles (2.4 km)]
- Between 0.5 miles (0.8 km) east of 6th Street to east of 7th Street [1.7 miles (2.7 km)]

Proposed Westbound Passing Lanes

- Between west of County TT and just west of 10th Street (Poskin) 1.4 miles (2.3 km)]
- Between WIS 46 (S) and County H (S) [1.5 miles(2.4 km)]
- Between WIS 46 (N) and WIS 65 (S) [2.0 miles (3.2 km)]

As a stand-alone alternative, the Passing Lane Alternative would not meet the capacity and level of service needs, nor would it provide measures for future planning of the 2020 connector route or correct all of the geometric deficiencies along the corridor. The addition of passing lanes is, however, considered as an interim measure under the Four-lane Alternatives.

D. Four-lane Alternatives

The 40-mile (64.4 km) corridor was divided into seven segments for study purposes of the four-lane alternatives. Some segments have multiple alternatives. In four of the seven segments, the alternatives could include the addition of passing lanes as an interim two-lane improvement. The Four-lane Alternatives can be further categorized as on-alignment, realignment, bypass, or through-town alternatives based on the predominant location of the proposed US 8 corridor within a particular segment. Key features include:

- On-alignment corridor alternatives utilize the current US 8 roadway for one direction of travel and provide an additional two lane roadway for the opposing direction of travel. On-alignment corridors are 400 feet (121.9 m) wide.

- Realignment corridor alternatives were developed to relocate US 8 around a small community or particular feature and potentially provide local road access via at-grade intersections. Realignment corridors are 400 feet (121.9 m) wide.

- Bypass corridor alternatives were developed to relocate US 8 around the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron. Bypass corridors would provide access only at interchanges. Bypass corridors are 600 feet (182.9 m) wide. A bypass corridor alternative could utilize an interim improvement where two lanes could be constructed on a four-lane facility right-of-way. As traffic increases, and capacity expansion is warranted, additional lanes could be added.

- Through-town corridors are urban alternatives through the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron with corridor widths of 120 feet (36.6 m) and 100 feet (30.5 m), respectively. In Turtle

Lake, the posted speed limit would be 45 mph (72.4 km/hr). The Turtle Lake through-town cross section includes curb and gutter, a 30-foot (9.1 m) raised median to accommodate left turns, 12-foot (3.7 m) lanes, 10-foot (3.0 m) buffer area, 5-foot (1.5 m) terrace, and 5-foot (1.5 m) sidewalk. The 12-foot (3.7 m) lanes are used because US 8 is classified as a long truck route.

- In Barron, the through-town cross section is narrower than Turtle Lake to reduce impacts to buildings close to the existing roadway. With a narrower cross section and less shoulder width, the posted speed limit through Barron would be 35 mph (56.3 km/hr). The Barron through-town cross section includes curb and gutter, a 22-foot (6.7 m) raised median to accommodate left turns, inside lanes of 11-feet (3.4 m) and outside lanes of 12-feet (3.7 m). A 6-foot (1.8 m) buffer area, 5-foot (1.5 m) terrace, and 5-foot (1.5 m) sidewalk completes this cross section.

The 400-foot (121.9 m) and 600-foot (182.9 m) corridors of the Four-lane Alternatives reflect the planning nature of this study and not the actual right-of-way needed. These corridor widths provide flexibility to accommodate possible shifts of the preliminary roadway alignment developed as part of this Tier 1 EIS during future, detailed design efforts. A 70 miles per hour (mph) (112.7 km/hr) design standard is used for the rural corridor types as required by the WisDOT Facilities Development Manual (FDM). The FDM standards also designate the typical rural cross section with 12-foot (3.7 m) lanes, a 60-foot (18.3 m) median, 6-foot (1.8 m) inside shoulders, and 10-foot (3.0 m) outside shoulders.

The study segments and segment alternatives are outlined in Table ES.4.1-1.

Table ES.4.1-1

US 8 Four-lane Alternatives

	Four-Lane Alternatives:	
Segment	**Segment Limits**	**Segment Alternatives**
I	**200th Street to 120th Street**	Deer Lake On-alignment Deer Lake Southern Realignment Deer Lake Far Southern Realignment
II	**120th Street to County E**	Apple River/Clover Lake On-alignment
III	**County E to 50th Street**	Range On-Alignment Range Northern Realignment Range Southern Realignment
IV	**50th Street to 15th Street**	Joel Flowage On-alignment Joel Flowage Northern Realignment
V	**15th Street to 5th Street**	Turtle Lake Alternative 1 (Short South Bypass) Turtle Lake Alternative 2 (Long South Bypass) Turtle Lake Alternative 3 (Northern Bypass) Turtle Lake Alternative 4 (Through-town)
VI	**5th Street to Sweeny Pond Creek**	Poskin On-alignment Poskin Southern Realignment
VII	**Sweeny Pond Creek to US 53**	Barron Alternative A (Short South Bypass) Barron Alternative B (Long South Bypass) Barron Alternative C (North Bypass) Barron Alternative D (Through-town)

ES.4.2 Preliminary WisDOT-Recommended Alternative

As noted in Section ES.3, the overall corridor preferred alternative selected will be a combination of preferred alternative in each of the seven segments. A preferred alternative has not yet been selected. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) provides an assessment of the alternatives and it is intended to assist decision-makers with selecting a preferred alternative. A preferred alternative will be presented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) after agency and public comment and testimony are considered.

The DEIS includes a preliminary WisDOT-recommended alternative to provide the public and agencies with a sense of WisDOT's recommended vision for the corridor and to garner feedback during the review process. WisDOT's recommendations are shown in the following table.

Table ES.4.2-1

Preliminary WisDOT-Recommended Alternative

Segment	WisDOT-Recommended Alternative
Segment I (200th Street to 120th Street)	Deer Lake Far Southern Realignment
Segment II (120th Street to County E)	Apple River/Clover Lake On-alignment Alternative
Segment III (County E to 50th Street)	Range Southern Realignment
Segment IV (50th Street to 15th Street)	Joel Flowage On-alignment Alternative
Segment V (15th Street to 5th Street)	Turtle Lake Alternative 4 (Through-town)
Segment VI (5th Street to Sweeny Pond Creek)	Poskin Southern Realignment
Segment VII (Sweeny Pond Creek to US 53)	Barron Alternative B (Long South Bypass)

ES.5 SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Impacts associated with the build alternatives are summarized on the Corridor Impacts Summary table, Table ES.5-1. The potential impacts include economic, community and business impacts, environmental impacts to wetlands, wooded acreage, and waterways, as well as potential impacts to historical and archaeological resources.

In general, through-town alternatives would limit impacts associated with creating a new roadway, but would have increased impacts to communities such as higher numbers of home and business relocations, more hazardous materials sites, and higher potential to impact historical sites.

Bypass and realignment alternatives typically have fewer impacts to homes and businesses, but typically have increased impacts to agricultural lands and the environment.

ES.6 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE AND PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Planning, agency coordination, public involvement, and impact evaluation are being conducted in accordance with:

- The National Environmental Policy Act
- The Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act
- The Clean Water Act
- The Clean Air Act
- Executive orders regarding wetland and flood plain protection
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Farmland Protection Policy Act
- Other applicable state and federal laws and policies

For WisDOT, public involvement is an ongoing effort throughout all stages of planning and design of a highway project. Public involvement and agency coordination efforts to date are summarized below and these efforts will continue. A public hearing will be held on this DEIS and the comments and responses will be included in the FEIS.

- US 8 Coalition

  Since 1994, the stated purpose of the US 8 Coalition has been "to secure the provision of safe and efficient travel, and economic growth on US 8 for the next generation." The US 8 Coalition mission statement says the group will "work cooperatively in promoting, developing, and prioritizing improvements to US 8 from the Minnesota/Wisconsin border to WIS 13 in Price County." The US 8 Coalition made recommendations to WisDOT and legislators that resulted in

funding for the US 8 corridor study resulting in preparation of this EIS. The US 8 Coalition membership includes county highway commissioners, county board committee chairpersons, and four community members each from Barron, Polk, Price, and Rusk counties. The US 8 Coalition participates in US 8 public forums and holds their own meetings to update members regarding the progress and issues along the project.

- Transportation Needs Survey

  In 2001, approximately 8,000 US 8 Transportation Needs surveys were included in a newsletter mailing to property owners along the corridor. Of the nearly 2000 respondents, 89 percent consider it difficult to pass slow-moving vehicles on US 8, and 93 percent consider it difficult to turn left onto or cross US 8. Over half of the respondents stated that the corridor improvement most needed is to increase capacity on US 8. The top two concerns in both the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron include the need for turn lanes and traffic congestion at intersections. The transportation surveys clearly identified that area residents and US 8 travelers seek improvements to the US 8 corridor.

- Focus Groups

  The study formed four separate focus groups to gather transportation-related concerns along US 8 in both Polk and Barron counties. Members of the focus groups consisted of local business owners, local employers, residents, farmers, and local and county officials, resulting in a total of 50 members. The focus groups met on a monthly basis for six months in 2001 and reported their findings in January 2002. The US 8 focus groups identified many needs as they relate to the highway but many of these needs also exemplified the importance of local transportation systems and land use planning. In general, focus group members portrayed US 8 as a barrier to safe pedestrian and bicycle movements in the urban areas of Barron and Turtle Lake.

- Vision Workshops

  To understand the specific transportation needs of US 8 in Turtle Lake and Barron, the study team hosted two public vision workshops in June 2002. One workshop was held in Barron and the other was held in Turtle Lake. Forty to fifty local participants attended each workshop. These workshops were an opportunity for individuals to participate directly in the future of their communities.

- Public Meetings and Outreach

  Along the 40-mile (64 km) US 8 corridor, area residents, businesses and farmers have been actively participating in the study process since it began in August 2001. During the first two phases of the study, the Needs Assessment and Alternative Analysis portions, the study team used a variety of information exchange forums including the transportation needs survey, focus group meetings, and vision workshops already mentioned. In addition, newsletters, Web site updates, local office hours, and personal and business group meetings have been used to exchange information and gather comment. A series of public information meetings garnered substantial feedback from property owners and the general public that improvements to US 8 are needed immediately in areas like the City of Barron and at major intersections. The public has indicated through these forums that the problems affecting US 8 are at a point where the public supports and desires improvements to the US 8 corridor.

ES.7 PENDING ISSUES

Further investigations need to be performed in the project corridor on archaeological sites following the selection of the preferred alternative. The determination of any Section 4(f) properties affected by the alignments will be determined by FHWA as part of the DEIS review process.